

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SOUTH MOLUCCAN TERRORISTS

REF: THE HAGUE 6361

1. SUMMARY: THE TERRORIST ACTIONS OF THE SOUTH MOLUCCANS HAVE DEMONSTRATED THE CAPABILITY OF THE NETHERLANDS GOVERNMENT TO MANAGE AN INFORMATION POLICY UNDER DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, THOUGH THERE HAS BEEN CRITICISM THAT TV MEDIA WERE FAVORED OVER THE WRITING PRESS. THESE INCIDENTS HAVE ALSO BROUGHT INTO FOCUS LIMITS BEYOND WHICH PHOTO REPORTING WILL RUN INTO CRITICISM. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESS COVERAGE AS WELL AS COVERAGE BY TELEVISION HAS BEEN EXTENSIVE, AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED. THE DUTCH PUBLIC HAS BEEN TREATED DAILY TO A GREAT DEAL OF VISUAL AND WRITTEN MATERIAL COVERING THE HOSTAGE ACTIONS AROUND THE TRAIN AND IN THE INDONESIAN CONSULATE GENERAL IN AMSTERDAM. IN BOTH PLACES THE GOVERNMENT, WITHIN A SHORT TIME AFTER THE ACTIONS, ORGANIZED AND MAINTAINED REASONABLY EFFICIENT SYSTEMS OF FEEDING INFORMATION TO THE MEDIA.

3. CONTROL BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FLOW OF INFORMATION WAS, OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COURSE, ESSENTIAL. THE MOLUCCANS ON THE TRAIN WERE ASSUMED TO

HAVE ACCESS TO A RADIO AND THEIR COMPATRIOTS IN THE CONSULATE GENERAL WERE KNOWN TO HAVE BOTH A TELEVISION SET AND RADIO. THIS ENABLED EACH GROUP TO KNOW NOT ONLY WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THEIR OWN CASE BUT ALSO IN THE OTHER.

4. GON MEDIA GUIDANCE CONSEQUENTLY SOUGHT TO SHAPE THE AVAILABLE INFORMATION SO AS TO GIVE MAXIMUM PRESSURE BY INDICATING THE GOVERNMENT'S DETERMINATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF THE USE OF FORCE.

5. ON TWO COUNTS THE PRESS EXPERIENCED DIFFICULTIES. FIRST, THE NEWSPAPERS WERE EXTREMELY UNHAPPY WITH THE APPARENT PREFERENCE SHOWN DURING THE SIEGE BY GON INFORMATION OFFICIALS TO TELEVISION JOURNALISTS. THE NEWSPAPER EDITORS UNDERSTOOD THE NEED TO RESTRICT THE FLOW OF INFORMATION. THEY RESENTED, HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT, IN ITS EFFORTS TO MAKE EXTENSIVE USE OF TV TO MANIPULATE THE FLOW OF INFORMATION, THE GON SOUGHT OUT TV JOURNALISTS BUT NEGLECTED THE WRITING PRESS. THE FACT THAT NEWSPAPERS WERE NOT GIVEN EQUAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION RANKLED. THE ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS AND THE SOCIETY OF CHIEF EDITORS HAVE BOTH CABLED PROTESTS TO MINISTER OF JUSTICE VAN AGT.

6. SECOND, THE NEWSPAPER "TELEGRAAF" (INDEPENDENT, CONSERVATIVE, 560,000) HIT MANY A RAW NERVE WHEN IT PUBLISHED A SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS DEPICTING THE EXECUTION OF THE THIRD HOSTAGE. DUTCH FEELINGS WERE VERBALIZED IN CRITICAL COMMENTS ABOUT BASIC DECENCY IN REPORTING, MADE ON TELEVISION BY JUSTICE MINISTER VAN AGT.

7. COMMENT: ON THE WHOLE, TREATMENT OF THE AFFAIR BY ALL NETHERLANDS MEDIA STRIKES US AS THOROUGH, BALANCED AND FAIR. BY AND LARGE, BOTH MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC WERE AWARE OF AND ACCEPTED THE NEED FOR HIGH DEGREE OF GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER THE FLOW OF MOMENT-TO-MOMENT NEWS. ANALYTICAL AND HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS, IN THE PAPERS AS WELL AS ON TELEVISION, MANAGED TO CONVEY FAIRLY COMPREHENSIVELY THE QUARTER CENTURY OF EVENTS LEADING FROM PRE-1949 ALLEGIANCE OF MANY SOUTH MOLUCCANS TO THE NETHERLANDS--THROUGH SERVICE IN THE ROYAL NETHERLANDS EAST INDIAN ARMY--THROUGH THE POST-1949 PERIOD, AFTER INDONESIA BECAME INDEPENDENT AND CHANCES FOR AN INDEPENDENT STATE FOR THE SOUTH MOLUCCANS VANISHED. EVEN THOUGH THE HOSTAGE ACTION AROUND THE TRAIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INVOLVED THREE PERSONS KILLED IN COLD BLOOD, DUTCH COMMENTARY DID NOT SHY FROM THE IMPLICATION--AND IN SOME CASES, THE CONCLUSION--OF DUTCH RESPONSIBILITY, AT LEAST IN PART, FOR THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS.
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